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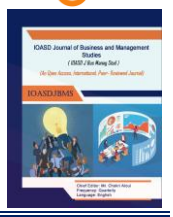

Influence of Teachers' Preparation on the Academic Performance of Children with Special Needs in Social Studies in Southwestern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study has determined the level of teachers' preparation for children with special needs in Southwestern Nigeria, and investigated the influence of teachers' preparation on the Social Studies academic performance of children with special needs in the study region. These were with the main aim of investigating the influence of teacher preparation on the Social Studies academic performance of children with special needs in Southwestern Nigeria. The population comprised children with different special needs categories which include Auditory Impairment (AI), Visual Impairment (VI), Emotional Disturbance (ED), as well as children with Learning Disability (LD). The sample consisted of intact classes of pupils in Primary One to Three. The multistage sampling procedure was used to select samples for the study. Three states were selected from six states in Southwestern Nigeria using the purposive sampling technique. These states were selected based on the availability of special needs schools. In the three selected states, purposive sampling technique was used to select three public special schools making a total of nine special schools in all. Two research instruments were used to collect data for the study. It was found that the study has shown that the level of teachers' preparation in teaching children with special needs in South Western Nigeria was moderate (48.0%). In the same vein, there was a significant influence on the academic performance of children with special needs in Social Studies in Southwestern Nigeria (p=0.05). It can be concluded that teachers' preparation has a significant influence on the academic performance of children with special needs in Social Studies in Southwestern Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Studies, Special Needs, CAL Resources, Academic Performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are important indices that aid children's holistic development. The growth of every learner in evident in their learning outcomes which include social, academic, and physical skills. When teachers contribute professionally to children's learning, they can remember the content taught, exhibit social skills, think logically, and make rational decisions. One of the subjects that is keen on the social and academic skills development of children is Social Studies. Though it is often believed that Social Studies is not a difficult subject, the academic performance of children with special needs in the subject has not always been encouraging (Adjei, Osei, Edusei, & Nakua, 2024).

In the view of Eniola (2014), special needs children in Nigeria are faced with different challenges in schools and communities. They tend to be abandoned by their teachers and mates in the school. Some of them are not enrolled in schools. For those who have the privilege of going to school, there is a high level of non-existing instructional resources to effectively ease their learning. As of 2023, out of the 20 million children who are out of school in Nigeria, more than 9 million of them have special needs (UNESCO, 2023). Okewole, Iluezi-Ogbedu, and Osinowo (2015) found that not all children with special needs have low academic abilities. However, the inability of schools to provide love and care for them negatively affects their academic performance. These explain that all children are important. More so, children with special needs must be taught by professionally trained teachers, in a "well-equipped" environment and with the use of innovative instructional strategies.

The teaching of Social Studies in children's formative years is geared towards their holistic development. Social Studies influences the ability of children to understand their immediate environment and relate effectively with others. Effective social activities are evident in the social, cultural, and intellectual development of the child. This is why the teaching of Social Studies in basic schools cannot be put aside in nation-building. Social Studies is a subject that offers learners comprehensive access to viable social interaction skills. It is a multi-disciplinary discipline that all Social Science courses (such as Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Demography, History, and Anthropology among others) sit on. According to Adeyemi and Onigiobi (2020), the subject helps in solving various societal problems such as corruption, insecurity, and high rates of poverty among others. The discipline is not just targeted at building morals, values, and societal norms among learners, it aids the development of critical thinking skills. This aligns with the place of improving human communal living. In all of these, there is a need to investigate the preparation of teachers when it comes to teaching Social Studies effectively among children with special needs.

Adeniji and Bolanle (2023) asserted the extent to which teachers are trained and prepared for the job is a great determinant of how well the pedagogical processes will be executed. Teacher preparation entails the qualification of teachers, teachers' years of experience, mastery of the subject matter, and how well teachers can use the resources available. On the contrary, teaching has been seen by many people as a stepping stone into other professions. Whereas, teaching in itself requires the availability of passionate and professional personnel to stir educational affairs. The creative ability of teachers, the ability to communicate to children regardless of their needs, the passion to convince all categories of learners to learn, and many more are the demands of professional teachers' training. Okewole, et al (2015); and Adeleke (2017a) observed that teachers' preparation goes beyond the "talk-chalk method" training for teachers but the ability to be creatively guided, understand lessons to be taught, plan lessons, engage learners dynamically, and exhibit a positive attitude towards learners and the teaching profession as a whole.

A prepared teacher is someone who has undergone professional teaching training and with evidence like good mastery of the subject, active, passion, and the readiness to make the learners learn at all times (Adunola & Adediran 2012; Frenzel, 2014; Débora, 2016; Eniola, 2017; Adeniji & Bolanle, 2023). Based on these submissions, trained teachers need to be able to develop a good rapport between themselves and the learners as a way of making sure that they have fun learning. When this is achieved, learners will not only be interested in the lesson but they would be ready to respond to questions from the teachers about the lesson. More so, instructional strategies adopted by teachers go a long way in this regard. It should be mentioned that a classroom is a place that is comprised of different kinds of learners with differences in terms of needs, exceptionality, tribes, intelligence, and many more. Therefore, teachers must be able to tolerate and accept the children with their differences. Furthermore, teachers should work with the learners at their own pace as each child is different. When this is achieved, learning of specific subjects as well as the core subjects would be done. For instance, observations have shown that children with special needs are best trained by teachers who have special training in line with the child's needs. This will, therefore, ensure that the right instructional strategies are used for the right set of learners and by trained teachers. In all of these, the current study looks into the nexus between teacher preparation and the academic performance of children with special needs in Social Studies.

Teacher Preparation in Effective Pedagogical Activities

Teachers are important elements in the field of education. Their roles, activities, and importance are connected to building nations by developing the child's skills and potential (Biesta, 2015). They are professionals who understand that each child is unique. Teachers are trained to encourage and support children with disabilities. They are also aware that each child is curious, capable, and intelligent. The child is a co-creator of knowledge who needs effective interaction with other children and adults (Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, 2023). The early childhood years are not only about preparation for the future but also about the present. ECE services need to be child-centered, acknowledge children's views, and actively involve them in everyday decisions in the ECE setting (Vegas & Jaimovich, 2015). ECE services should offer a nurturing and caring environment for learners. It provides a social, cultural, and physical space with a range of possibilities for children to develop their present and future potential (Ajayi, 2019). All these are indicators that teachers must be able to engage effective and efficient understanding of the child's needs, attend to their needs, and treat them specially (Vegas & Jaimovich, 2015). However, in doing these, teacher preparation is a key terminology that cannot be left undiscussed.

In a study carried out by States, Detrich, and Keyworth (2012) in America, it was stressed that teacher preparation is the process where teachers are trained to handle the needs of the child. It was added that the state of teacher preparation will determine their effectiveness and ability to make a difference in the lives of the children. States et al., (2012) unveiled that teacher preparation started about 150 years ago when teachers were trained and reinforced before teaching and educating learners. Teacher preparation started as a way of teaching passionately and professionally. People do

not just teach because they are talented, sociable, and loving. They need to be certified to become professional teachers. Teaching is a combination of interest, passion, and positive attitudes to pedagogical activities. Though it has been found that many teachers in a developing country like Nigeria engaged in the profession because they could not get their dream jobs. This does not contradict the fact that teaching is more than a coincidence but a purposeful action (States et al., 2012; Vegas & Jaimovich, 2015; Iroegbu, 2017; Ajayi, 2019).

Oko and Uwatt (2015) in a study carried out in Nigeria inferred that teacher preparation is an essential tool that determines the readiness of teachers, their motivation, as well as subject mastery to teaching. It is the ability to dish out the right and quality content to learners. Professional teachers need to understand their subjects and engage in effective teaching resources and strategies Teaching school subjects for teachers therefore should be based on quality delivery. That is, being able to make learners understand educational content. Teachers in ECE settings must be friendly, committed to play-learn activities, engage in effective interaction, and understand the individual differences of children. This is why ECE teachers are always exposed to either ECE, pre-primary, or primary training to ensure that they understand the dynamics of children and not just the ability to master content (Oko & Uwatt, 2015). ECE teachers are people who have been trained to master their learners, their subjects and techniques. According to the FGN (2014), no education system can grow beyond the quality of its teachers. In tandem with the policy, one of the goals of teacher education is to enable teachers to use the correct instructional resources to bring about active learning among learners. To this end, teachers need adequate training to be able to educate learners effectively, use teaching resources wisely, and apply the right practicable tools for the practicum of the subject.

According to Oko and Uwatt (2015), the qualifications and experience of teachers go a long way in how effectively they will be able to teach learners. Communication and effective disposition of knowledge should be acknowledged by teachers. Active communication of knowledge alongside the use of relevant teaching resources will give room for effective learning (Handrianto, Jusoh, Nengsih, Alfurqan, Guchi, & Tanoubi., 2021). Looking through another lens, teaching is not just about understanding the objectives but also the right usage of the needed tools for effectiveness. This shows that teacher training and preparation are concerned with understanding both human and non-human resources for effective pedagogical activities. It should also be emphasised that it is one thing for teachers to teach and it is another to know how to communicate the objectives (learning outcomes). Iroegbu (2017) and Handrianto et al. (2021) stressed that teacher preparation can affect the academic performance of learners based on how they carry out their jobs. This is one of the reasons why teachers should always pass through some levels of professional training from time to time. Professional training allows teachers to gain more experience and insights into the use of new instructional strategies and skills. Handrianto et al. (2021) further established that teachers who have fewer teaching skills and experiences tend to insignificantly affect the knowledge of learners.

Teachers when after they have passed through professional development will affect positively the motivation and reinforcement of learners toward learning (Koteva-Mojsovska & Bancotovska, 2015). Other factors like teachers-learners' communication, right teaching methodologies usage, and content organisations will be enhanced during the process of teacher training (Podolsky, Kini, & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Perhaps, teachers have total subjectivity to what happens in the classroom, among learners, and the interaction of learners-content relationships. The right use and expression of the curriculum must also be put in place by classroom teachers. The year of experience is one of the elements that make teachers' variables. Podolsky et al. (2019) unveiled that the teachers' years of experience go a long way in their ability to deliver. It was further stressed that teachers who have stayed long in the teaching profession easily help children solve academic problems (Mormah, 2021). Experiences have been said not to be gotten in training institutions alone but also during a long period that a person has used in gathering information, knowledge, and content relating to a particular field. In all of these, teaching is an act that is built over a long time after coming in contact with different forms of content, facts, and figures. In other words, the experiences of teachers are the sole determinants of understanding learners' needs.

Koteva-Mojsovska and Bancotovska (2015) in their study asserted that teacher educational training and pedagogical experience are a reflection of how well they understand the teaching environment. It also reflects how they can adapt to new environments based on creativity and innovation. By implication, when the teaching environment is up to standard, children will develop and demonstrate their practicable learning abilities such as the use of play, practical, social interaction, and many more (Ko, Sammons, & Bakkum, 2013). More so, when a quality teaching environment is in place, the expression of the subject curriculum will not just be clear to learners but they will also gain enough insights into it (Ko et al., 2013). The physical environment dictates largely the quality of children's social and psychological environment. When the learning environment is poorly planned, it will lead to poor learning. Rachel (2016) therefore asserted that student teachers' experiences during teaching practice should be rich, extensive, and practical-based. This should be a time when student teachers will determine if they are ready to go into the teaching profession or not. Trained teachers must be able to create the right and conducive environment where

pupils love to learn and express their creativity (Rachel, 2016; Iroegbu, 2017).

In line with the above-discussed, children need a physical and social environment where they can fully express their potential, ask questions, and supply answers to questions asked by their peers as well as teachers. This shows that teachers have an excellent job of ensuring that the learning is friendly. The experience of teachers will either have a positive or negative impact on the academic performance of learners (Tamir, 2020). More so, studies (Rachel, 2016; Tamir, 2020) have shown that the teachers' years of experience affect learning outcomes. That is, inexperienced teachers will negatively affect the learners' academic outcomes. Tamir (2020) added that teachers' expertise is not developed in a day. They must have excellent features such as the readiness to teach, the use of excellent teaching resources, good communication ability, and readiness to learn (Ko, Sammons, & Bakkum, 2013; Rachel, 2016). On this note, teachers also have to be professionally developed as this will boost their subject mastery, therefore positively influencing the performance of learners when due. Tamir (2020) asserted that teachers should always be exposed to professional training from time to time as a way of improving their skills and potential.

Despite the invaluable contributions of teachers to the development of society, teacher education programmes are more important because it prepares and helps teachers to be 21st-century compliant and 22nd-century ready (Mormah, 2021). Teacher education institutions have been critiqued for their inability to produce teachers who are properly grounded in pedagogy and andragogy skills. Chukwu (2019), however, observed that the transition from academic theories to the real world has not been effective. Learners, at times, find it difficult to practice what they have been taught in school when they get home (Adeyemi & Adeyemi, 2014). This is because student teachers are not often properly trained to put into practice current teaching and interactive skills that have been theoretically learned.

Apparently, the realisation of the educational objectives depends on the quality and quantity of the available teaching manpower. This can be influenced by the availability of adequate training and retraining programmes for those about to teach and those already teaching (Okodoko & Samuel, 2012). Hence, the efficiency of teacher education should be the determining factor in the success or failure of education to meet the country's needs. Teacher education involves the implementation of policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school, and wider community (Idoko, 2016).

In Nigeria, the main types of teachers' training that are commonly in use are the National Certificate of Education (NCE) and educational degrees in education which can be in different subjects or educational practice areas. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Education (NPE) (2014) stated that all teachers in educational institutions should be professionally trained and teacher education programme should be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties. The role of colleges of education and faculties of education in Nigerian universities cannot be overemphasised (Ubogu, 2020). Faculties and colleges of Education are the educational institutions that produce professional teachers who are equipped with pedagogical and anagogical skills for teaching in both primary and secondary schools. Students of colleges of education who complete their courses of study are to teach in primary and junior secondary schools while successful students from faculties of education are to teach in primary, junior, and senior secondary schools (Okodoko & Samuel, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

In line with the above, studies by Eniola (2014); Adeleke (2017a); and Adeleke (2017b) have noted that the rate of declination in educational quality in Nigeria is alarming; they added that globally, it is the right of the child to be educated. However, Nigeria still experiences lots of challenges in her educational corners such as classroom discrimination and labelling, inadequate teachers' remuneration, and lack of motivation for both learners and educators. Studies in the areas of interpersonal relationships and psychomotor skills development of special needs learners have been overcrowded leaving few studies on academic performance. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the influence of teacher preparation on the Social Studies academic performance of children with special needs in Southwestern Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives

The main focus of the study is to investigate the influence of teacher preparation on the Social Studies academic performance of children with special needs in Southwestern Nigeria. The following are the specific objectives guiding the findings.

i. To determine the level of teachers' preparation for children with special needs in Southwestern Nigeria; and
ii. To investigate the influence of teachers' preparation on the Social Studies academic performance of children with special needs in the study region.

Research Question

Based on the objectives guiding the study, the following question is answered in the study.

i. What is the level of teachers' preparation in teaching children with special needs in South Western Nigeria?

Hypothesis

This study is guided by the hypothesis stated below.

H_0 I: There is no significant influence of teachers' preparation on children with special needs performance in Social Studies in the study region.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design using the correlational type. The population for the study comprised all special needs pupils and teachers in public special needs schools in Southwestern Nigeria. The population comprised children with different special needs categories which include Auditory Impairment (AI), Visual Impairment (VI), Emotional Disturbance (ED), as well as children with Learning Disability (LD). The sample consisted of intact classes of pupils in Primary One to Three. The multistage sampling procedure was used to select samples for the study. Three states were selected from six states in Southwestern Nigeria using the purposive sampling technique. These states were selected based on the availability of special needs schools. In the three selected states, purposive sampling technique was used to select three public special schools making a total of nine special schools in all. Two research instruments were used to collect data for the study, namely: Teacher Preparation Questionnaire (TPIRSQ) and Social Studies Term Scores Retrieval Sheet (TPQ). The data collected were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question: What is the level of teachers' preparation in teaching children with special needs in South Western Nigeria?

Table 1: Percentage Analysis Showing the Level of Teachers' Preparation in Teaching Children with Special Needs in South Western Nigeria

S/N	Teaches' Preparation Indices	High	Moderate	Low
1	Teachers' involvement in different types of professional development activities.	32.0%	45.0%	23.0%
2	Teachers' participation in school work and policy development.	45.0%	49.2%	5.8%
3	Teachers' mastery of the subject.	43.6%	49.8%	6.6%
	Average score	**40.2%**	**48.0%**	**11.8%**

From the findings, it can be inferred that teachers' involvement in different types of professional development activities was moderate (45.0%). In this vein, teachers' participation in school work and policy development was also moderate (49.2%). Furthermore, teachers' mastery of the subject was found to be moderate (49.8%). In all of these, it can be concluded that the level of teachers' preparation in teaching children with special needs in South Western Nigeria was moderate (48.0%).

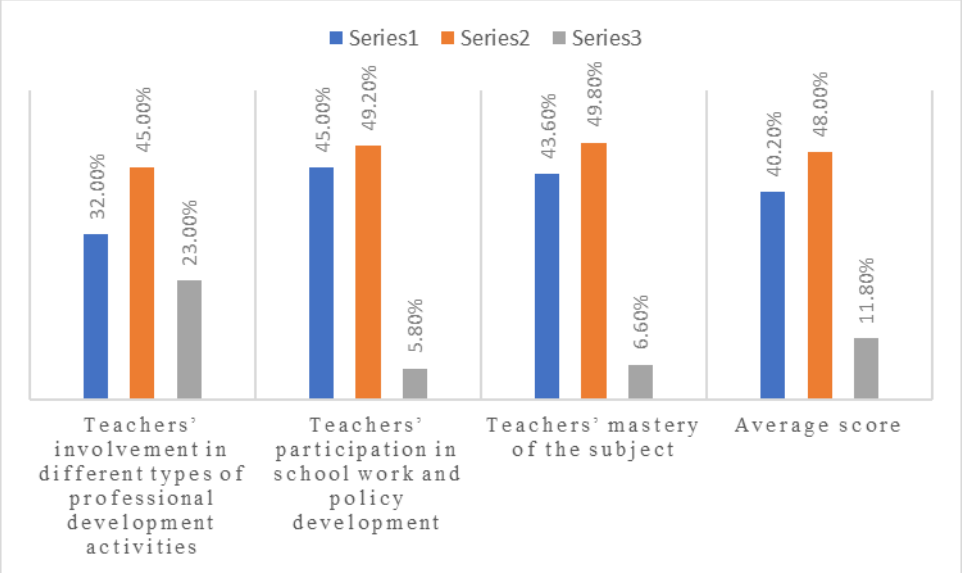

Figure 1: The level of teachers' preparation in teaching children with special needs

Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of teachers' preparation on children with special needs performance in Social Studies in the study region.

Table 2: Linear Regression Analysis on The Influence of Teachers' Preparation on Children with Special Needs Academic Performance in Social Studies in the Study Region

Model Summary					ANOVA[a]	
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.159[a]	0.025	.020	14.66757	4.595	0.033[b]
Predictors: (Constant), Teachers' Preparation Dependent Variable: Social Studies Academic Performance						

Table 2. shows the model summary of the influence of teachers' preparation on the academic performance of pupils with special needs in Social Studies in Southwestern, Nigeria. The table also shows that the R-value in the test was 0.159 and the adjusted R-square was 0.025. This may be interpreted to mean that teachers' preparation exerts a maximum of 15.9.8% and a minimum of 02.5% of the variance observed in Social Studies scores. The F-value obtained in the test of the model for significance was 4.595 at p = 0.033. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that the model is significant. By implication, there is a significant influence of teachers' preparation on the academic performance of special needs pupils in Social Studies in Southwestern, Nigeria.

Results of the study have shown that most of the teachers have been in the profession for more than five years and they are well-grounded in teaching children with special needs. The level of teachers' preparation in teaching children with special needs in South Western Nigeria was moderate. This finding aligns with Kariuki, *et al* (2019), and Wafula *et al.* (2023). It was stressed that teacher preparation goes a long way in the quality of lessons they deliver. Their years of experience in the teaching profession are also in tandem with their effectiveness. According to the findings of Oko and Uwatt (2015), teacher preparation is an essential tool that determines the readiness of teachers, their motivation, as well as subject mastery to teaching. It is the ability to dish out the right quality content to learners. In other studies (States *et al.*, 2012; Vegas & Jaimovich, 2015; Iroegbu, 2017; Ajayi, 2019; Fakolade and Ashara, 2021), it was stressed that teacher preparation should be taken seriously in special schools. A large number of teachers in the present study have been able to meet up with these requirements.

CONCLUSION

This study has determined the level of teachers' preparation for children with special needs in Southwestern Nigeria; and investigated the influence of teachers' preparation on Social Studies academic performance of children with special needs in the study region. These were with the main aim of investigating the influence of teacher preparation on Social Studies academic performance of children with special needs in Southwestern Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design using the correlational type. The population for the study comprised all special needs pupils and teachers in public special needs schools in Southwestern Nigeria. The sample consisted of intact classes of pupils in Primary One to Three. Two research instruments were used to collect data for the study. It was found that the study has shown that the level of teachers' preparation in teaching children with special needs in South Western Nigeria was moderate. It can be concluded that teachers' preparation has a significant influence on the academic performance of children with special needs in Social Studies in Southwestern Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed based on the findings of the study.

1. Relevant stakeholders should prioritise teacher education as it greatly impacts teacher preparation which ultimately affects pupil's academic performance as well as the quality of education. One of the important stakeholders is the Ministry of Education. The ministry needs to be supportive in the areas of instructional resources. Parents also need to give emotional support to their children. This will make them to be more motivated to learn.
2. Teachers need to be more dynamic in evolving the learning of students. They should improve their pedagogical skills and be more prepared to continue to improve the academic performance of the learners. Special needs schools should be more committed to the engagement of conferences, workshops, and seminars for teachers. The government also has a part to play in this, especially in the area of funds.

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